

It is the same in spiritual life. We enter a world of antagonism and opposition the moment we resolve at Christ's feet to be Christians, to be true men and women, to obey God, to forsake sin, to do our duty. There never comes an hour when we can live nobly without effort, without resistance to wrong influences, without struggle against the power of temptation. It never gets easy to be a worthy and faithful Christian. Here again the cross lies at our feet, and every day it must be taken up and carried, if we would follow Christ.

We are apt to grow weary of this unending struggle and to wonder why it must go on forever. It seems to us a cause for discouragement that it is so hard to be good, that we must fight so constantly to overcome evil, that it costs such agonizing effort, first to enter into the kingdom and then to be loyal in it. Sometimes we are almost ready to give it all up and cease our struggling.

Yet it is true that the spiritual nobleness and beauty after which we are striving can become ours only thro this very struggling. A Scotch martyr, in the terrible days of Claverhouse, had on his crest the motto in Latin, "*Sub pondere cresco*"—Under a weight, I grow. On the crest was a palm-tree, with weights depending from the fronds. In spite of the weights the tree yet grew up straight as an arrow, lifting its crown of graceful foliage high in the serene air. It is well known that the palm grows best loaded down in this way. Thus the martyr testified that he, like the beautiful tree of the Orient, grew best, in his spiritual life, under weights.

This is the universal law of spiritual growth. There must be resistance, struggle, conflict, or there can never be victory. "We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope." Men are apt to pity those whose lives are scenes of unending trial and endurance, but God's angels do not look upon them with pity if they are victorious in their struggles, for they are thus climbing daily upward toward the holy heights of sainthood. We need opposition; without it we can never have moral fibre. People who have only ease in life may be happy in a sense, but they never learn the blessedness of victory. Some one says, "We need the pinches of poverty, the pangs of hunger, the savage bites of winter. We need to overcome before we can possess."

Have you noticed in the beatitudes of the Apocalypse that all the blessings promised are for those who overcome? "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life." "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna." "He that overcometh, the same be clothed in white raiment." "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in temple of my God." Spiritual life needs opposition to bring out its best development. It flourishes most luxuriantly in adverse circumstances. Even what we call hindrances most advance its progress. We grow best under weights. The very temptations which make our life one unceasing war-

fare, train us into true soldiers of Christ. The hardness of our experiences, which seem to be more than we can possibly endure, make the very school of life for us, in which we learn our best lessons and grow into whatever beauty and Christlikeness of character we attain.

## The Sunday School

### LESSON FOR OCTOBER 2

BY THE EDITOR

Reformation Under Asa.—II Chron. 14: 2-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Help us O Lord our God; for we rest on thee. II Chron. 14: 11.

LESSON THOUGHT.—The Lord will deliver those who trust him.

#### Introductory Notes

We now turn back in the course of history and begin the study of the history of Judah at the point where the division occurred. Asa was the third king of Judah. His father Abijah was neither very wise nor very good, yet he did a good work and died in the "odor of sanctity." Asa took advantage of the heritage left him by his father and made the very best possible use of the opportunities which came to him. "In his days the land was quiet ten years." He reigned forty-one years, the first fifteen years of which are covered by this lesson.

#### Home Readings

Reformation under Asa, II Chron. 14: 1-12.  
God's presence, II Chron. 15: 1-9.  
A solemn covenant, II Chron. 15: 10-19.  
Call to repentance, Amos 5: 4-15.  
Trust in God, Psalm 20.  
God the strongest defender, Isa. 31.  
Reward of obedience, Prov. 3: 1-10.

#### Meaning of the Text

Verse 2. This was the trend of his reign. He sought carefully to know the will of the Lord as it was interpreted by lawmakers and prophets, and zealously sought to conform his life to that law.

V. 3. The foreign gods, the idols of the surrounding nations. The high places were altars built on the hill tops, and the groves were wooden posts and holy trees consecrated to Astarte, the Phenician Venus. These Asa cut down and burnt.

V. 4. He issued a proclamation throughout his kingdom to worship Jehovah as the only God of Israel. He did right and taught others to do right also. It was not enough simply to destroy these false gods; the king must teach the people the worship of the true God.

V. 5. He took away all the relics of idolatry, left no visible objects that would remind the people of their idol worship. This he did not only in Jerusalem, but throughout the nation in all its chief cities. Then the kingdom had rest and quiet for a period of ten years. Verse 1.

V. 6. It was a time of peace, and the king devoted his time to the strengthening of

the kingdom. It was not a preparation for war; the fortifications were a means of defense. Rest and quiet usually go together, but sometimes there may be rest even amid strife, for when barbaric invasion shattered the national quiet, Asa was still able to say to the Lord, "We rest on thee."

V. 7. The old saying, "In time of peace prepare for war," has often been abused, but it has some wisdom underneath it. The king felt that they had free and undisputed possession of the land; that there was nothing to hinder them from making the nation strong against the day of foreign invasion, and so they did. The walls and towers were not for attack, but for defense. The Lord had given the people rest and quiet, and they now make what they think, to be the best use of the opportunity at hand.

V. 8. This made an army of 580,000 men of valor. It was not a standing army in the modern sense of that term, but the king had provided with weapons all citizens on whom he felt justified in calling in time of war. Targets were long shields, covering nearly the whole person. Spears were the most readily used weapons of ancient warfare. While the king trusted in God, he did not neglect the defense of his country.

V. 9. It is not certainly known who Zerah was, some larger critics incline to believe that he was a king of Egypt, or the general who represented the king. If so the reason for the invasion may have been Asa's refusal to continue to pay tribute which Shishak had imposed upon Rehoboam. Here was an army of 1,000,000 men, the largest of which we read in scripture. Mareshah was about twenty-five miles southwest of Jerusalem and was the first great Jewish fortress to which Zerah's army came.

V. 10. As soon as the news of the invasion reached him, he went to meet the army.

V. 11. On this prayer nothing need be said but that uttered in the spirit it was, must bring an answer from God.

V. 12. The Lord fought the battle for Asa and his people, as he had prayed.

#### Lesson Points

1. Fear God and keep his commandments.
2. This is the only way of peace and success.
3. If we would succeed in any reform we must first uproot evil to make room for the good.
4. In time of trouble call on the Lord.
5. God is the best defense of any people.
6. In time of peace we should prepare for the sterner duties and realities of life.

#### To Make You Think

1. What is there remarkable about the fact that Asa did that which was good and right?
2. Is it easier for some people to do right than it is to do wrong?
3. Is it easier for all people to do so?
4. What principle of reform did Asa observe?
5. Would his reforms have been of avail without the covenant into which he entered with God?